

Q: Good afternoon. Today is June 2nd, 2016. My name is Melanie Eagan and I'm here at the Newton Free Library with Philip Stoner and together we are participating in the Newton Talks Oral History Project that is being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. So, what is your connection to Newton? If you lived in Newton before and after your service what did you miss most about home, aside from family and friends?

A: You mean when I was in the service? By the way, are you picking me up okay?

__: Yeah.

Q: If you lived in Newton before and after your service what did you miss most about home? So I think while you were in, yeah.

A: Actually I don't recall that I missed much of anything. Yeah, I grew up in Newton from the age of 18 months roughly, and left here to go to college, then left here to go into the Marine Corps. I don't really think about missing stuff so much. I was kind of busy.

Q: Where exactly did you serve? And do you remember arriving, and what was it like?

A: Yeah. Well, where I was actually working was in Northern I Corps. 95% of it was in the artillery fan of the North Vietnamese artillery on the other side of the border. I do remember getting there rather distinctly, because I got off the plane, jumped on the bus, and I noticed that there was, what do you call it, chain link fencing over all the windows. And being a curious young Lieutenant, I asked the driver why the chain link fencing was on the windows, and he said, "So they don't throw grenades into the bus." And I said, "Hmm." That was sort of when a little voice went off. Did you ever see *The Wizard of Oz*? At one point Dorothy gets moved by a tornado and when she lands she says, "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore, Toto." That was sort of my this isn't Kansas anymore moment.

Q: Tell me about a few of your most memorable experiences.

A: Well, I guess one of the most memorable experiences was when I reported into 12th Marines Headquarters Battery. I asked about the whereabouts of my, the fellow that I had lived with for the last eight months at the Basics School and then at Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and the Regimental Adjutant's eyes got about as big as saucers, and he said, "We shipped his body home three days ago." So that was kind of memorable. What else?

The first time we got rocketed was memorable. Tet of '68 was kind of memorable in total, because we were in the northernmost position in South Vietnam, and we were absorbing artillery fire on a daily basis. And when it's throwing dirt down the back of your neck it's really a little bit too close. And when you look around after an airburst and you see scars in the sandbags that you can reach out and touch with your elbow that is really too close. That's about it.

When I worked in civic action, which I did for the last five months that I was in country, working with the Vietnamese people was generally a lot of fun. They didn't have Penicillin so when we went out and ran medical clinics, which we called Med Caves, in the local villages that was pretty cool, because at that time in 1968 Penicillin cured everything, and we could pretty well guarantee if we went into a village this week and could get one mother to hold her kid still so we could shoot them up with Penicillin and get rid of the yaws, we would have every single kid in the village lined up the next week, because the Vietnamese traditional cure for yaws is to smear cow dung on the infection, maybe a bit of surprise to you folks, but that doesn't really work that well, but Penicillin back then worked boom. Now not quite so much, but it's still pretty good.

What else? Is that enough?

Q: You can add as much as you want.

A: Okay.

Q: You can talk about anything.

A: I think that's about it.

Q: Okay. Are there any humorous or exciting memories from when you were on leave?

A: Any what?

Q: Exciting memories from when you were on leave or R and R?

A: Actually no. I went to Hong Kong and it was fun, I traveled around all of Hong Kong and the new territories, which is, Hong Kong itself is actually an island that the territory of Hong Kong also includes the British dubbed the new territories for reasons which I never figured out, but I was able to get far enough to the north to look into Red China, which at that time we weren't getting along with them as well as we are now, so that was kind of cool.

And I think the thing that I got a kick out of the most, outside of going to the San Francisco Steakhouse and having this little Asian kid about that tall, for the microphone it's about three-and-a-half feet, standing out there in an authentic cowboy uniform, complete with toy cap, cap pistols. The other thing that I noticed was that in Hong Kong everything is super crowded so that around here when they dig up the road they just dump it in a pile any old place, in Hong Kong they actually picked up the paving blocks that were the first layer, arranged them in a circular fence, and then dumped all the earth into that circular fence so it didn't take up as much space, which I was just impressed.

Q: Are there any other funny stories?

A: Well, the best sight gag I ever had in my life occurred when we were in Gio Linh during Tet of '68, and one of the Platoon Commanders for the company that I was working with decided that he wanted to get a railroad bridge blown down so that if the North Vietnamese came across with tanks they at least couldn't use the railroad bridge to get up into our rear. And he actually had to go up there four different times to get it blown out. I went with him on the third time and he didn't have enough explosives so we scarfed up a 250 pound bomb on the way out and used that for part of it. But the Company Commander had given me a small package of firecrackers, the little ones that are about half to a quarter inch in diameter, and so he set the bomb off. He did succeed in blowing a lot of the dirt off, but he did not touch the concrete underneath so that the solidity of the bridge stayed. And as we went back out to take a look at the new crater in the Earth I whipped up this little package of firecrackers and said, "Hey, Ed, the skipper told me you could try these also." He was so darn disgusted he didn't budge. Like I said, it was the best sight gag I ever had in my life. [Laughter]

Q: Do you mind answering some more questions?

A: No.

Q: How did you stay in touch with family and friends back home?

A: Letters. We tried tape recording, but that was kind of slow and kind of awkward, so mostly letters and I think I wrote about 200 of them home while I was there.

Q: Do you recall the day your service ended?

A: Leaving Vietnam or released from Active Duty?

Q: Either.

A: Okay. I don't really remember leaving Vietnam too much. I was happy. I do remember leaving the Marine Corps, because at that time I was going to go back here, so I left there on Friday the 5th of September, drove up here, and went to, started at Northeastern the Monday, the 8th of September, 1968, which was kind of a difference in culture.

Q: What was it like to return to civilian life?

A: Mostly pretty good. My network of friends accepted me very well. Some of the students in Northeastern weren't too thrilled with the fact that I had been in the Marine Corps. I do remember a particular conversation I had with one of my classmates in which I told him that two of the Marine Lieutenants in my Gunnery class at Fort Sill out of the eight of them had been killed, and his response was, "Good." So, it was a real disconnect between the military and civilian at that particular point in the narrative.

Q: How did your service and experiences affect your life and your outlook on war and the military in general?

A: Well, I think it was good experience for life. I did a few times use some of the-- what's the word-- concepts of doing the right or wrongest thing a few times. I'm not exactly a fan of war. I know that World War Two was necessary. Korea did work out reasonably well. But after that the track record got a little bit less reasonable. We didn't do anything in Vietnam except kill a bunch of their soldiers and, unfortunately, a bunch of the South Vietnamese civilians, along with a bunch of us, and we didn't accomplish anything by it, in my opinion.

Q: What would you like people to know a hundred years from now?

A: [Laughter] Do things a little bit differently maybe?

Q: We still have some more questions. What were you doing before you entered the service?

A: Before I entered the service, well after I got out of Newton, and it's not Newton North at that time, it was just Newton, because before the South was built, or finished anyway. I went to Wentworth Institute for two years to get an Associate's degree in Production Engineering and Technology. And then I went out to Millikin in Decatur, Illinois for three years to get a Bachelor's of Science in Industrial Engineering.

Q: How did you join, draft or enlist, and why did you choose that specific branch?

A: I enlisted. I chose the Marine Corps because at the time I thought I might want to make the Marine Corps a career. I obviously didn't. But that was my thinking at the time. Also one friend of mine had joined the Marine Corps a couple of years before that and he spoke fairly highly of it.

Q: How did you adapt to military life, including the physical regimen, barracks, food, and social life?

A: The physical regimen really wasn't that difficult for me, because I had been working out and also working physically every night at the United Parcel Service for the last year I was in Millikin. The food was actually pretty good. Social life was, like the uniform, somewhat monochromatic, but at the time we thought we were doing something that would be important and generally the folks that made it all the way through the program were, I would say, pretty

much glad to be there. But at that time, because we were all facing the alternative of the draft, and I don't know of anybody that really found that an appealing career option.

Q: Did you have any like close friends?

A: No. Well, a fellow that I found out had died the day I reported into headquarters at Battery 12th Marines was a close friend of mine. Other than that, we didn't have time for too much in the way of enduring friendships. I would consider Charlie to have been a good friend, and I know when we were at Fort Sill he and an Army Lieutenant, Hanno Weisbrod would entertain us at dinner just about every night. They were both very creative. They had a good sense of humor which they were keen to share. And they were going through a regimen of training which there was a lot to laugh at if you were creative, which both Hanno and Charlie were.

Q: Is there anything else that you would want to add or share?

A: Well, I don't know what you're interested in, frankly.

Q: Anything.

A: Okay.

__: What was your connection to Newton?

A: I'm sorry say that again?

Q: Oh your connection to the union?

__: To Newton.

Q: Newton.

A: Newton? I grew up here. My dad moved us to Newton when I was about 18 months old, and we lived on Ara Street in Newton for 13 years. Ara Street was kind of interesting, because of the roughly 15 houses on the street three of them sent kids, well young men at that point, off to the Marine Corps. John Murray was killed as a Lance Corporal while in Vietnam. Mark Landry was at Commander and Chief Pacific Office in Honolulu for, I think for all three years, and he died of Leukemia about four years ago. And I'm the one that is left! Although I did have one good run with gastrointestinal lymphosarcoma in '71 as a result of Agent Orange, I think.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add? What was high school like in Newton?

A: I was at Newton High School for three years, during which it didn't affect me very much and I sure as heck didn't affect it very much. [Laughter] I was a dedicated nonparticipant in everything, although I did try out for the gymnastics team my senior year, but it was too late by that time. Well, in 1957 we had moved to 350 Auburndale Avenue, but my parents lived there until 1974, so they moved out when my father retired, but all of my growing up years were in, specifically in Auburndale.

I did work-- You ever hear of Norumbega Park?

__: Yeah.

A: Okay. I used to run the crazy cups.

__: [Laughter] Okay.

A: I actually worked there two years. The first year I wasn't old enough to run the machinery, because I was only 17, so they had me in the penny arcade. And the second year I was old enough to run the cups.

Q: What was the park? What was it?

A: Do you have an answer to that?

__: We do, but--

A: Yeah, Norumbega Park was established shortly before the turn of the century. There used to be a trolley line running down Commonwealth Avenue and that Norumbega Park was the end of trolley amusement park. They built them in a lot of places, primarily to try to promote more use of the trolley during the summer. And until the near universal acceptance of cars, specifically the Model T, that was one of the few places that people in Boston could get to easily during the summer for recreation. And during the 1990s to 0-something or other canoeing was a really big part of the entertainment in this area, and although I think they were exaggerating a little bit I have read of people speaking that you could actually walk across the Charles River on the canoes, and they weren't exaggerating by a whole lot. Are you familiar with the Marriott?

Q: I think so.

A: Okay. That's where the park used to be. All of the apartment buildings across the road from the Marriott used to be the parking place for Norumbega Park, and they had rides, caterpillar, lindy lou.

Q: Was that just in the summer or was it like a year round thing?

A: It was just in the summer. The Totem Pole Ballroom would run year round. It was an indoor dance venue. But yeah the rest of the park was simply only open in the summer. And they used to have a zoo. By the time they worked there they had one very lonely bear and that was it.

Q: Is there anything else you would do for fun in Newton?

A: Actually a lot of it was going, I road bike a lot out into Weston, Natick, Lexington, Quincy, places like that.

Q: Did you do any sports besides the gymnastics?

A: No. I was really interested in airplanes at that time in my life, and my biggest achievement in sports was one time I had the football in a local, what we played on the street, and while I had the football I stopped to look at a Piper Cub going over, and my teammates were not accepting of that behavior. I didn't realize it initially, but I picked it up pretty quickly. They were [00:24:26] but it was a nice plane.

Q: You talked about going to school for engineering. Did you ever pursue anything with that degree?

A: Yeah, after I got out of Northeastern I went to work for Eastern Airlines for about 18 months as an industrial engineer. I like to say, I was a feather in the wings of man. I don't think you know that ad campaign, though some of you folks may remember. I got laid off. Then I went to work at Wesson Memorial Hospital in Springfield, again as an industrial engineer, although the title out there was Management Engineer. And that's when I kind of learned to enjoy hospitals, so I stayed in until 1999, but I was first a Vice President for Professional Services and then for 14 years I was, I worked for a hospital management company managing hospitals in four

different states, dragging my family all over the map of the country. And that was a pretty good gig. I got fired at the end of it, but until that it was pretty good.

Q: If one of your children wanted to join the service what would you tell them?

A: Well, my daughter is 42 years old and I don't think there is any reasonable possibility that she is going to join any military service. My son is 38 and again yeah I don't think so. If they wanted to I wouldn't try to stop them. I would just as soon they didn't, but it's not my life, it's theirs.

Q: Do you have anything else you want to share, last minute thoughts? Like what is the most memorable thing you can take away from it?

A: From being in the service? Well, the thing I remember the most, although I didn't figure this out at the time-- Have you ever seen the movie *We Were Soldiers*?

Q: I've heard of it.

A: Has anybody here ever seen the movie? Oh my gosh, alright. The movie *We Were Soldiers* was the movie in which an Army battalion got pretty well clobbered over about a four day period by a significantly larger North Vietnamese unit, and at the end of the movie they had a clip with two North Vietnamese Officers who miraculously knew English, speaking of what had just gone on, and they spoke of grabbing the enemy by the belt buckle. What that means is you pull them in close enough that they can't, they being us in this case, can't use their supporting arms effectively, because if they're within 50 yards of you it's not healthy to bring artillery in closer than a couple of hundred yards, so if they grab them by the belt buckle and got in close to them they were not immune from our supporting arms, it was, you had to use it with care, lots of care.

We did have one instance when we were up in the, just below the Demilitarized Zone, where I think they tried to do that to us, when they did try, I called for artillery fire as quickly as I knew how, and I was, I think I was informed by the aerial observer who was flying overhead, the bird dog, that's a single engine I-wing monoplane. You don't have a clue. [Laughter] Oh my. Alright, anyway, they would fly around at an altitude of about 300 feet.

And when the first two rounds came in the North Vietnamese that had been running toward us, most of them turned around and ran the other way, so the grab the enemy by the belt buckle tactic did not work that time. And I certainly, I've never talked to any North Vietnamese, so I don't know for sure what they were doing, but that seemed to me that that is what they were doing, and I didn't even realize it until I sat bolt upright in bed in about 1983, having just figured it out. But that was, you know, 399 days out of the 400 I didn't really get too much done, but that day was important to me.

Q: Do you have any advice for anybody going into the service?

A: The only advice I would give somebody going into the service at this point in the narrative is to follow your heart, what you want to do. It is a career path that is honorable, respected a little bit more than it used to be, but I think you really need to think about what you want to do out of your life before. And that is not just for military service, that is just about for anything. If you wanted to be a doctor and ended up being a stockbroker you probably wouldn't be happy with that career switch either.

Q: Thank you so much for taking time to do this with us, and we're really happy to be able to include you in Newton Talks Oral History Project.

A: Okay.

Q: It's very nice to meet you.

A: Nice to meet you.

END OF INTERVIEW